VA Financial Systems' Terry Riffel Sees Value in Tech Integration

The VA's Financial Management Business Transformation leader discusses how technology modernization will integrate financial and acquisition systems to improve services to veterans.

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Terry Riffel, Deputy Assistant Secretary, VA Financial Management Business Transformation

One of the things that I think is important is that VA is probably in the largest transformation in terms of IT in history right now. I think it's important for people to
understand it's not just one, it's multiple initiatives within VA that actually are going to interplay with huge transformation with VA.

**What is the importance of transforming the VA's current financial management system?**

Today, actually has a number of legacy solutions that don't talk to each other. One of the things that we're doing — it's one of the tenants of this particular program — is that to have that integration. The solution that we're implementing actually has acquisition and finance as an ERP solution. We will actually be integrating both the acquisition community and the finance community in one solution. That doesn't exist today, so that's going to be a huge benefit for VA in the future.

Longstanding in VA, we've not had an integrated acquisition and finance solution. It's presented problems in terms of what VA's buying and how we're leveraging buying and all of that. Implementing this new solution is going to allow us to be at the forefront of where that spend is and understanding the needs of our veterans a lot more than we do today.

**How will the FMBT program enhance veterans' services?**

So actually getting information down at the station level and real-time information is going to allow those station directors and those that are caring directly for our veterans information that they need about how their hospital budget is being spent and where they can better utilize their funding to support our veterans. In addition to that like Veterans Benefits Administration we're going to be able to link at the transaction level what the C&P information and all the compensation benefit information and better understanding in real time the information supporting our veterans.

**What areas has seen the most improvement for IT transformation at VA?**

VA has had a couple of successes around enterprise-wide deployments. Recently
about July last year we completed the VA time and attendance solution for VA. That was an enterprise-wide application that was deployed across the enterprise, affected about 360,000 VA employees. VA does have a track record on being able to implement enterprise-wide solutions and know how to do that. Fortunately I was able to be part of that and so leveraging lessons learned from there to apply to this implementation is going to be very worthwhile.

**What lessons learned stood out to you?**

One of the things that really have to do at VA is address organizational change management. So because VA's legacy systems for a number of years, when we made changes, widespread changes like that, it requires a lot of attention at the employee level — so really, boots on the ground and having people before, during and after the deployment so we can hand-hold and make sure you don't leave that facility until everybody is comfortable with the new technology.

**What are some of the challenges organizational change presents in a large organization like the VA?**

We're going in early; we're doing a readiness assessment of the workforce and the infrastructure. We're developing a profile of what change will be needed at Mattoon Medical Center or a regional office so that we develop their organizational change and their operating model to fit them specifically. So that again, it's not one size just going across the enterprise; it's unique to the services and the mission of that particular entity.

**Where do you see the future of VA's financial management?**

The future of VA's financial management system is an integrated solution with acquisition and finance. In order for VA to get an entire picture of the spend and the commodities VA uses to care for our veterans, an integrated solution is going to allow us to do that.
What emerging technologies do you see playing a key role in the future of financial services at the VA?

Some of the key things that we'll continue to leverage is, in this particular solution, is in the cloud. I think that that's really key for VA to sort of leverage the existing cloud that they have; there's a couple clouds and we're utilizing one of those. I think that they need to continue to expand the different services that are being provided by the cloud solution rather than decentralize things at the medical centers the way that they do today.

The other is really leveraging existing technology around data analytics. VA has a lot of robust data solutions and being able to leverage that and help VA understand and connect what's going on across the large enterprise that VA has is going to help us make the right decisions in the future. I also think that VA is starting to look at robotics and there's a lot of processes that could apply that technology within VA as well.

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